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Lawmaker: Remove Radioactive Waste From Landfill

St. Louis Public Radio - 6/17/13

By Chris McDaniel and The Associated Press

A suburban St. Louis lawmaker is calling for the removal of nuclear waste from a landfill near Lambert Airport.

Underground smoldering at the Bridgeton Landfill has created a foul odor so strong that Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster sued the landfill owner, Republic Services.

Bridgeton Landfill is part of the larger West Lake Landfill. Another area of West Lake contains nuclear waste from the Cold War era.

Democratic State Rep. Bill Otto of St. Charles on Monday called for emergency action to remove the nuclear waste, citing the threat from the underground fire.

"This material should be considered volatile as it sits, it should be considered a danger to the community," Otto said. "And I believe the EPA should declare this an emergency removal and get it out of the landfill now."

Otto said the Environmental Protection Agency miscalculated in part due to a misplaced decimal point, and that it's much worse than federal officials think. He points to a report put out by a Washington University professor of Earth Sciences to back up his claim.

"We should protect the community before the stuff gets airborne, before it's a problem," Otto said. "And if the EPA wants to sit and say 'We'll protect you when it gets airborne,' I'm not going to accept that. I will not accept that."

The EPA says the radioactive material is not endangered by the fire and there are no plans to remove it.